

Documents on Diplomacy: Resources

Section XII: The Post-Cold War World & the 21st Century

Diplomatic Terms & Historical Events

Diplomatic & Other Terms

Ambassador The official representative from one country to another. An Ambassador is the highest ranking official assigned to live in a foreign country for an extended period of time. In the United States, an Ambassador is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The title of Ambassador was first used in the United States in 1893. Prior to that, the highest ranking American diplomats were Ministers Plenipotentiary.

Arbitration The formal process of dispute settlement by referring the matter to mediator agreed to by the disagreeing parties.

Attaché A recognized, but not uniform, title for members of a diplomatic mission. They may be either junior members of the diplomatic corps or specialist staff from outside of the traditional diplomatic establishment who often report to their home agencies.

Asylum: Protection given to a person who has left their home country, usually for political reasons, but not for criminal offenses.

Belligerent States Nations which are in a recognized state of war.

Blockade An official action designed to prevent people or goods from moving from one place to another. A war measure that isolates some area of importance to the enemy.

Charge d'Affaires The member of a diplomatic mission who takes charge of an embassy or legation during the temporary absence of its head. The chargé may also be the diplomat who acts as head of a country's lowest-level diplomatic mission that is neither an embassy nor a legation.

Charter The formal statement of an organized group that serves as its constitution or governing document.

Commission A group of representatives or diplomats who are given authority to accomplish a specific task.

Consul An official appointed by a government to protect its commercial interests and help its citizens in a foreign city.

Diplomacy The term is used to describe the practice of conducting relations with other nations, such as negotiating treaties, alliances, or agreements.

Diplomat An individual who is appointed by a government to represent its interests and to conduct its relations with another government. An Ambassador is the highest ranking U.S. Department of State diplomatic representative to another nation.

Diplomatic Corps Those engaged in on-going or specific official diplomatic efforts. Included are the Secretary of State, ambassadors, and special envoys to other nations and their staff members who support the work of diplomacy.

Diplomatic Mission An individual or group sent by a government to conduct negotiations or establish relations with another country. A diplomatic mission can be temporary or permanent.

Dispatches Official messages sent with speed between a government and its overseas diplomats or between nations.

Embargo An official ban by a government preventing trade with another country. An order of a state forbidding ships to enter or leave its ports.

Embassy The official headquarters of a government's Ambassador and other representatives to another country. It is usually located in the capitol of the other country. An Embassy is the highest level of diplomatic representation.

Envoy An agent sent by a government or ruler to transact diplomatic business.

Foreign Policy The official views and policies of a government regarding its relations with other nations. In the United States, foreign policy is developed by the President, with the advice of the Secretary of State and others, and is implemented by the Department of State and any other officials designated by the President.

Legation A diplomatic mission headed by a Minister whose title was "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary." A legation is the second level of diplomatic representation and is less important than an embassy.

Minister Plenipotentiary A diplomat with the authority to represent a head of state but of a lower status than an Ambassador. Until 1893, diplomats who headed American missions overseas only carried the title of Minister Plenipotentiary. The complete title is "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary."

Negotiate The term refers to discussions between individuals, groups, or nations that are conducted for the purpose of arriving at an agreement on a particular set of terms or actions.

Neutrality A legal status assumed unilaterally by a state during a time of war, indicating its intention to stay out of the war.

Nonintervention: The doctrine that intervention in the affairs of other nations is improper.

Protocol The system of rules and acceptable behavior used at official ceremonies and occasions. This may also refer to an official international agreement.

Ratify A state's formal act of consent to be bound by a treaty which it has already signed. In the United States, the Senate ratifies treaties negotiated by the Executive Branch.

Rebellion An attempt to remove a government or a leader by force.

Refugee A person who leaves his or her country to find safety, especially during war or for political or religious reasons.

Revolt An attempt to remove the government of a country by its some of its citizens, using force.

Sovereignty The authority of a state to govern itself.

Statesman An experienced politician, who is respected for making good decisions.

Treaty A formal agreement between two or more countries or states, as in reference to terms of peace or trade and any limitations associated within the agreement.

Trusteeship The idea that a territory should be administered for another state for an indefinite period of time until it is better able to govern itself.

Important Places, Concepts, and Events

Agenda 21: A 1992 United Nations action plan for sustainable development. The UN reaffirmed its commitment to the plan at the 2002 Earth Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.

al-Shabbab: A group of Islamic militants fighting to overthrow the government of Somalia. By 2011, the group controlled large areas of the country and imposed strict Islamic law.

al-Qaeda: A militant Islamic terrorist movement founded by Osama bin Laden in the 1988-1989 time frame. The United States responded to al-Qaeda's attacks on civilian and military targets by launching the "War on Terror."

Anti-Semitism: Extreme suspicion of or discrimination against Jews on account of their heritage.

Arbitration: The formal process of having an outside person, chosen by two disputing persons or groups, resolve their differences.

"Assalaamu alaykum": An Arabic greeting translated as "peace be upon you."

Avian Influenza: Often called "bird flu," this is a virus that affects birds and may sometimes be deadly if it becomes adapted to humans.

Bilateral Trade: Trade exclusively between two states.

Camp David: The country retreat of the President of the United States located near Thurmont, Maryland.

Camp David Accords: An agreement brokered by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 between Egypt and Israel. These accords directly led to a peace treaty between the two in 1979.

Chronic Wasting Disease: A disease that primarily affects the deer family. While there have been reports of the disease passing into the human population, scientists have not yet found definitive proof.

Coalition: A group of different organizations or nations who agree to work together for a specific purpose, usually for a short period of time.

Coalition Forces: The multinational military group that worked together to oust Saddam Hussein from Iraq in 1990-1991.

Desert Storm: The name given to the military operation against Iraqi forces in Kuwait in 1990-1991.

Duty Free: Something sold without any additional taxes.

Ebola: An infectious and very serious disease with fever and bleeding inside the body. It is usually fatal.

Endangered Species: A population of organisms in danger of becoming extinct.

Epizootic Disease: A disease that appears as new cases, more rapidly than usual in an animal population. In a human population this would be called an epidemic.

Eradication: The process of getting rid of or completely destroying something bad.

EU (European Union): An economic and political union of 27 European states. It was established under its current name in 1993.

Extremism:

The practice of holding beliefs that most people feel are unreasonable or unacceptable.

Fatwa: An official statement or order from an Islamic religious leader.

Free Trade: The buying and selling of goods, without limits on the quantity of goods that one country may sell to another, and without special taxes on imports from a foreign country

G20: A group consisting of finance ministers and central bank chiefs from 19 major global economies and the one representing the European Union. Together these economies control 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product or GDP.

GATT: An international agreement negotiated in 1947 and designed to promote world trade. It was replaced in 1995 by the World Trade Organization or WTO.

Gaza: A Palestinian city located in the Gaza Strip.

GDP: The “Gross Domestic Product” is the total of all the final goods and services produced in a country for a certain period of time. Dividing the GDP by the population of the country is an indicator of the country’s standard of living.

Globalization: The development of closer economic, cultural, and political relations among all the countries of the world.

Ground Zero: The point on Earth’s surface closest to a detonation. The phrase has been used in the 21st century to refer to the site of the September 11, 2001, attack in New York City.

Guantanamo: The site of a bay located on the southeastern tip of the island of Cuba. By the provisions of a 1903 treaty, the United States maintains jurisdiction over a military base, despite the objections of the Cuban government.

Hamas: The Palestinian political party that governs the Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah: A Muslim militant group and political party based in Lebanon. Hezbollah receives military training, weapons, and financial support from Iran.

HIV/AIDS: HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It is a disease of the human immune system that first emerged in the early 1980s. In 2009, the United Nations reported that an estimated 25 million people had died from AIDS and 60 million had been infected.

Human Rights Watch: An international non-governmental organization, or NGO, that advocates on behalf of human rights around the world.

ICBM: (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles) A long-range ballistic missile designed to deliver atomic warheads more than 3,500 miles.

Iran Hostage Crisis: A 1979 crisis between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It began when students unaffiliated with the government seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held American diplomats hostage for 444 days. The crisis contributed to President Jimmy Carter’s defeat in the election of 1980.

Jihad: An Arabic term meaning “struggle,” which is an important duty for Muslims. It can mean a struggle to maintain one’s faith, a struggle to improve society, or a struggle to defend Islam.

Kabul: The capital city of Afghanistan.

Koran: The central religious text of Islam.

Kyoto Protocol: A controversial 1997 UN agreement aimed at fighting global warming. Since then, 191 states have signed and ratified the protocol. The only signatory not to have ratified the Kyoto Protocol is the United States.

Liberalization of Trade: A system of trade policy that allows trade between nations with minimal interference or oversight from their governments.

Lobbying: The practice of representing a particular interest or cause during interactions with policy makers or legislators.

Millennium Development Goals: Eight international development goals that all 193 members of the United Nations agreed to achieve by 2015.

Montreal Protocol: A 1987 treaty designed to protect the ozone layer. It was a follow-on agreement to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer.

Mujahideen: Muslim soldiers fighting in support of their political and religious beliefs as part of jihad.

Multilateral Trade: Trade between more than two nations.

NAFTA: The North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) was signed by the United States, Mexico, and Canada. It was designed to create a regional trade bloc.

Operation Iraqi Freedom: The military operation during the administration of President George W. Bush to invade Iraq in March 2003.

OECD: The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is an international organization founded in 1961 to promote international trade.

OPEC: The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries has 12 member states and is headquartered in Vienna. It was designed to protect its members states by ensuring price stability. It

played a controversial role during the oil crises of the 1970s.

Palestinians: An Arabic-speaking people with origins in Palestine.

Palestinian Authority: An administrative body that governs the Gaza Strip.

Paradigm: A very clear example used as a model.

PRC: The People's Republic of China, a Communist state established by Mao Zedong in 1949.

Protectionism: Government actions to protect its trade or industry by putting taxes on goods bought from other countries or by limiting the quantity of goods that can be imported

Quarantine: The practice of keeping a person or animal who might have a disease separate for a period of time until their health status can be determined.

Regional Trade: A policy that focuses on improving and expediting trade between nations in a certain area.

Rio Declaration: The Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development was the agreed document produced by the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Subsidy: Money given by a government or organization to help or encourage reform or modernization.

Sustainable Development: A policy of resource use that aims to meet human needs while protecting the environment from permanent damage.

Taliban: A militant, Islamic organization that ruled large parts of Afghanistan, including the capital city of Kabul beginning in 1996. The Taliban was overthrown in Operation Enduring Freedom and many of its supporters fled to mountainous regions or to Pakistan.

Talmud: The central text of mainstream Judaism.

Tariff: A tax placed on trade goods entering or leaving a country.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A 1948 document of the United Nations. It was the first time nations around the world agreed that people had a fundamental right to certain freedoms. Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt led the U.S. delegation.

USAID: The United States Agency for International Development

Vienna Convention: The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer was a 1985 multilateral UN agreement that came into force in 1988.

West Bank: The territory on the west bank of the Jordan River.

World Trade Center: A seven-building complex in lower Manhattan, characterized by twin 110-story skyscrapers. It opened in 1973 and was destroyed in a 2001 terrorist attack.

World Trade Organization (WTO): An organization that works to encourage and liberalize trade between nations. It is the successor organization to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Zakat: One of the five pillars of Islam calling on believers to give a fixed portion of their income to charity for the benefit of the poor.